2/5/75

Dear Peter Irons,

Part of the fascination the Hiss case has always held for me is the belief that so many competent people who should have known better made so many mistakes. However, I was not able to follow it closely because it came at a time when I was just beginning to be a dirt farmer. Not far from Chambers, by the way.

I knew of Adam Kunze but do not recall the name Horace W. Schmahl.

Not knowing the results of your work if I make suggestions that may be worthwhile they may also duplicate what you have done.

There is a society of former OSS people. An undependable friend has borrowed this and a relevant file. Nicholas Deak was the head when I was asked to join. (I didn't.) Office: New York City. Their membership roster may include assignments. If these people were Nazis, it is not unlikely that others who served with them would have known it and disliked them for it.

The Anti-Defamation League of the B'Nai Brith might have material on them.

You do not say where in Florida Schmahl now lives. If it is anywhere near Miami and you use the right introduction, States Attorney Richard Gerstein or his investigator, Martin Dardis, might be helpful. Bothare not without reported areas of irresponsibility and publicity seeking. The right extreme hates Gerstein. I think his home was bombed.

Beginning the end of the 1930s I made extensive use of the files of the Clerk of the House. I made a copy of every voucher filed by the Dies Committee. This may have led to a change in the law to make what I did impossible, but I'd check and be certain if there is a reasonable prospect Schmahl was working for Nixon or that committee. Any friend of the late Lou Russell, who worked for Nixon then, might have some information. Russell died right after being pressured by the FBI immediately after the Watergate arrests. Heart attack, the stories said.

That forging of the old Woodstock typewriter always interested me. I used to know the manager of the Washington Woodstock agency. His wife was a volunteer worker for the Senate committee for which I worked. He hung around much. I was always, quite possibly without cause, edgy about him. I think the name was Schild or something like it. And I did not believe an ordinary typewriter mechanic could duplicate all the individual characteristics, especially from wear, especially well enough to escape scientific detection.

The question of access is one on which I thought the original defense was unusually incompetent.

I did not follow the Galindez case closely but knew about it. I also knew Latin Americans in the diplomatic set in Washington. They were of the opinion that it was another assassination Johnny Abbes did for Trujillo. They described him to me as Trujillo's assassin. Aside from Latin American anti-Trujillo sources, which could include Mexicans and Cubans, our and the British governments must have files on Abbes. I seem to recall his having gotten into trouble in London. I don't know whether this could help you.

I was not a spook so I had no contact with them except those I've forgotten, when I was called in sort of as a last-resort troubleshooter. I was an analyst.

Perhaps the one who told you about me and OSS was thinking of a case I broke in six weeks, the Paris case. I used nothing but what the lawyers had in their files and did not understand. I can conceive of this being pertinent in the Hiss case.

My newest book centers around a formerly Top Secret Warren Commission transcript I got after "losing" what has to be the most bizarre of all Freedom of Information law cases. In it, never expecting that anyone would ever know what he said, Dulles let his hair down. One of the provocative passages is not subject to a single interpretation only. It is where he talks of the Hiss case. One possible interpretation is that he was framed. Incidently,

I was and I remain certain this was the case. Dulles' explanation centered around the rug.

You do not say what the purpose of your research is. I presume it is to establish the truth. You do not say what your belief is. Mine is that the vicious psychopath Chambers deliberately framed Hiss. He could have depended on the silence of others and he could have done it with no other assistance.

Have you considered using the Freedom of Information law? I think some of the material you seek can now be obtained and without the complications and the stonewalling the FBI has been going through. They have no choice. Otherwise they incriminate themselves. (I doubt any of the pending investigations would look into this but it could be within their authority and it would be productive for them, too.)

I'm sorry I can't be of more help. Perhaps if I knew other areas of your interest I could be.

If you believe our talking could serve any purpose I am but an hour from Washington or Baltimore.

Speaking of Baltimore, the Sun may have carried stories other papers didn't because Chambers was a local for them. If this could help you, they should have a fairly decent morgue.

Have you checked Schmahl in old city directories for the relevant periods?

While I can't disprove them, I find the allegations that Donovan personally saw to the forging of a typewriter while he ran OSS and that he or anyone in it would have commissioned a Nazi to do it hard to believe. Schmahl was more likely playing his own kind of game with that investigator. Perhaps it was only perversity, but other possibilities might be considered.

If you think my going over your other material on Schmahl could be of help I'll be glad to.

Have you learned how that kind of character came to be part of the defense? Who recommended him, who hired him? The story you tell is pretty farout for any time, more for that period, after Dies, after Nixon was well know, after people had time to learn to be more cautious. And while Hiss was not an investigator, he had been on a Senate investigating committee. I can't believe that Schmahl was not vouched for by someone who was trusted.

If I may suggest it, the essence of investigating a tough case is siezing upon an important fact and bulldogging it to death. Given what you say of Schmahl, while I would not expect it to solve the case (and would expect other approaches could or would), I do think it could be an important part of establishing a frame-up. If not a traitor within.

If I am correct in believing that Stripling is dead, as a scholar I think seeking access to his files might not be a waste of time.

Good luck.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg